

Fires Brigade S3 addresses Environmental Morale Leave

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Fires Brigade Operations

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At a certain point during the deployment in Iraq, every Soldier in the Fires Brigade will be given the opportunity to take a break from his or her daily routine. The program that will provide that break is called Environmental Morale Leave, or EML.

The purpose of this program is to allow Soldiers to see their families, loved ones and friends during the long deployment separation. EML provides Soldiers up to fifteen days of chargeable leave under the government's travel expense to their choice of destination, CONUS, or OCONUS as approved by their chain-of-command.

The request for specific dates are considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, a service member whose spouse is expecting a baby may request an EML for certain dates to take his leave in order to attend the delivery. This type of situation, along with children's graduation and other immediate family occasions are given a higher priority. However, only ten percent of the unit is allowed to be on leave at the same time. While all requests are considered, some may not be granted because of the ten percent rule.

While the intent of this program is to maintain service member's morale by giving them the chance to reacquaint themselves with their family, loved ones and friends after long deployments, one might ask if the program really hits the mark, or make things worse. Both married and single Soldiers have mixed feelings about it.

While some may think EML will help lift their morale by giving them the chance to see their family and friends in the middle of the deployment, others may think differently. For example:

Pfc. Kristina Blair who works in the brigade's S2 section thinks that seeing her family for only two weeks before returning to Iraq for the remainder of her deployment would only make her sadder. Therefore, she decided to spend her leave in Germany with her roommate, rather than spending it with her family. On the other hand:

Sgt. Enrique Collazo who works in the brigade's S3 thinks differently. Collazo believes that anytime spent with his family will be time well spent. He thinks that getting reacquainted with his family, even for just a short period of time would maintain and increase his already high morale.

Regardless of how we utilize this opportunity, the EML will continue to be a valuable program for our brave members of the U.S. Armed Forces, allowing them to take a break from the daily deployment routine.

My advice to the Fires Bde. Soldiers: Take advantage of this opportunity and enjoy every bit of it.

My advice to Family and Friends: Take advantage of this opportunity and enjoy every bit of it.